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ABSTRACT

Nested in a complex environment of expectations, regulations, professional standards, and historical traditions, schools are the object of many influences. The main question of this paper is: To what extent and under what conditions do external agents help schools develop intellectual quality and strong professional communities? The paper examines data from the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools' (CORS') School Restructuring Study, which focused on 24 schools undergoing restructuring. The findings provide insights about the relationship between school structures and the schools' professional cultures. Three forms of assistance by external agents were found to have the potential to promote intellectual quality and professional community: sustained schoolwide staff development; standard-setting aimed at learning of high intellectual quality; and deregulation. By itself an external agent could not successfully transform an unfocused, fragmented school into one characterized by intellectual quality and professional community. Those schools whose culture already predisposed them to consider issues of intellectual quality and professional community found productive ways to use the resources and opportunities offered by external agents. In short, successful reform depended on interaction between positive aspects of culture and structure. However, independent developers, districts, states, and parents provided important technical assistance, funding, and political support. Each of the 24 restructuring schools experienced some positive influence from external agents. The most successful schools had basic cultural features that combined with structural autonomy to allow them to flourish at the margins of their educational systems. (Contains three references and four endnotes.) (LMI)

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CHAPTER 11

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CHAPTER 11

SUPPORT FROM EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Gary G. Wehlage, Eric Osthoff, and Andrew Porter

Nested in a complex environment of expectations, regulations, professional standards, and historical traditions, schools are the object of many influences. Initiatives advanced by districts, states, federal agencies, independent reform projects, parents, and citizen groups aim to help schools improve. While these external agencies have critical financial, technical, and political support to offer, they do not always speak with one voice. Competing demands and sometimes rapid shifts in leadership and policy can pull schools in different directions, making it difficult for schools to maintain a constant course of reform. The main question of this chapter is: To what extent and under what conditions did external agents help schools develop intellectual quality and strong professional communities?[1]

The School Restructuring Study focused on selected schools undergoing restructuring and we looked at the impact of external agencies through the eyes of local educators, from the school outward. Those agents identified by informants and observers most often as having some important impact on these schools were districts, states, parents, and "independent developers" (i.e., private non-profit organizations dedicated to promoting school reform and restructuring). We examine these four most active external agents and describe their attempts to support school restructuring.

This analysis provided additional insights into the relationship between school structures and the schools' professional cultures. We found that by itself an external agent

could not successfully transform an unfocused, fragmented school into one characterized by intellectual quality and professional community. Rather, schools with a culture that was predisposed to consider, or already focused on, the principles of intellectual quality and professional community provided the most productive responses to initiatives from external agencies. These schools were inclined to find productive ways of using new resources and opportunities.[2] In short, success in reform depended on interaction between positive aspects of culture and structure.

Three forms of assistance by external agents had the potential to promote intellectual quality and professional community: sustained schoolwide staff development; standard-setting aimed at learning of high intellectual quality; and deregulation that increased the autonomy to act on a well defined vision.

Staff Development

Staff development programs have great potential to help educators focus on the intellectual quality of student learning, and if the programs stimulated staff to work together collectively to examine their goals and improve their practice, then staff development also strengthened professional community. Our analysis indicated that whether staff development programs offered by external agents promoted attention to intellectual quality and professional community depended on three general factors. First, was staff development sustained for a sufficient time to have an impact on teachers? Second, was the whole faculty involved? Unless all staff shared in a long term experience, the outcome was likely to have uneven, fragmented results. These two factors--sustained over time and staff inclusiveness--were structural.

A third factor in the success of staff development programs was the underlying purpose of the program. Cultures in the restructuring schools differed in the extent to which staff focused on the substantive goals and values required for providing students with high quality pedagogy. Introducing new administrative and teaching techniques, procedures, and structures produced little change in the quality of student learning if teachers failed to address intellectual issues concerned with student learning. For example, ninety-minute classes (a structural change sometimes advocated as part of reform programs) had little pay-off for higher intellectual quality if teachers continued to cover large amounts of material, rely on drill and practice, and remained satisfied with students reproducing only isolated facts, definitions, and algorithms. But ninety-minute class periods offered a significant structural aid for promoting authentic pedagogy only when teachers used the time for students go into greater depth through inquiry, extended conversation, and thoughtful writing.

To illustrate the importance of structure and culture in staff development programs, we describe some reform efforts advocated by the Coalition of Essential Schools. Eleven SRS schools had membership in the Coalition. The Coalition offered a general framework of "common principles" to guide restructuring, a process for planning school change, and opportunities for a school's educators to interact with other practitioners engaged in school reform.

The Coalition conducted national staff development activities. Typically a school sent two or three teachers to an intensive summer workshop on instruction. Following the workshop, teachers were expected to share their expertise with others in their school, and also to be available to visit other schools as coaches to help with reform. Many schools also sent

two to five teachers to an annual national Coalition conference where practitioners had an opportunity to exchange ideas and rekindle their commitment to reform.

Many teachers in the SRS schools, however, were exposed to the Coalition primarily through local professional development efforts to implement practices advocated by the national organization. For example, local retreats stressed inquiry to identify schoolwide issues and goals. Ideally, this process was intended to promote consensus and planning for organizational changes needed to implement reform. In some cases, teachers formed voluntary study groups to further investigate restructuring issues and to learn from teachers' experiences at other schools. In a few of the eleven schools, staff development activities like these helped to strengthen professional community and produced greater staff clarity about the intellectual purpose of the school and how it might be promoted. However, generally such efforts tended to be highly episodic, consisting of one or two sessions on a topic with little or no follow-up. In most cases, staff development was not school-wide; it was optional and attended only by interested teachers. Such activities had little chance of building consensus on a school's vision or in promoting professional community.

Few teachers in the Coalition schools reported having participated in any professional development that was focused on the intellectual quality of pedagogy. Instead, they attended to procedural knowledge needed to make administrative changes (such as how to implement block scheduling or heterogeneous grouping), or technical changes in classroom practice (such as using cooperative grouping or having students keep portfolios). These technical and administrative topics were important, but staff development on them apparently did not help faculties establish clear visions of pedagogy designed to promote learning of high intellectual

quality. The common rhetoric that accompanied staff development devoted to technical and procedural issues was sometimes mistaken as evidence that staff had arrived at a shared set of educational goals and practices. But use of common labels to describe teaching procedures did not produce a vision focused on intellectual quality.

Of the eleven schools with Coalition membership, only one (Cibola) was driven by a vision that included a focus on the intellectual quality of student learning and the importance of building a strong professional community. It was not clear exactly how this clear vision about learning and professional community developed. To some extent, it appeared that these characteristics preceded staff development by the Coalition. However, it was also apparent that staff used Coalition ideas and resources to consider how best to refine instructional practices to promote student achievement of high intellectual quality. In contrast, other Coalition schools addressed instruction and learning in such general terms that teachers could justify almost any instructional practice with one or more of the Coalition's principles. Differences in impact from staff development based on the Coalition of Essential Schools are illustrated by comparing the responses of Cibola High and Winema Elementary.

Interviews with Cibola's teachers revealed that they had a sophisticated understanding and interpretation of the Coalition's vision of learning. Many of them came to the school because they saw it as a place receptive to their beliefs. Others, identified as having a set of values and skills that Cibola wanted, were recruited to the school. Cibola's teachers shared a core set of standards for judging the intellectual quality of curriculum and students' work. The standards were consistent with and used some of the language of the Coalition. They also participated in formal sessions and networking sponsored by the Coalition, but this was

only a small part of the staff development effort at this school. Professional development occurred primarily in team planning periods and departmental/division sessions where teachers shared their expertise through discussion and debate that helped them to further clarify and implement their standards.

In these informal staff development sessions, discussion commonly centered on goals for instructional practices such as student portfolios, interdisciplinary curricula, student internships in the community, and graduation by exhibition. Internalized standards for high quality learning allowed teachers to draw from the Coalition principles and staff development opportunities without getting distracted from their own vision. Cibola illustrated how the culture of the school was essential for productive use of staff development resources provided by an external agent such as the Coalition.

At Winema Elementary, a large suburban school with only a small percentage of poor and minority students, the district officially endorsed the Coalition and allocated $250,000 to support staff development based on the Coalition's ideals. Winema staff conducted a week-long retreat, as prescribed by the Coalition, to build consensus for restructuring. About a dozen of its fifty-four teachers participated in either national conferences or summer training sessions during three years.

Nevertheless, Winema's staff development lacked a sustained focus. During one year, for example, the school hosted thirteen staff development activities under the Coalition's banner with titles such as: Total Quality Management; management information systems; whole language instruction; cooperative learning; and study skills. No consistent theme guided the work, and these topics tended to direct teachers toward management procedures

and teaching techniques rather than to defining standards for intellectual quality. Of course technique is important, but in this case staff development did not help most teachers to address the intellectual content of the work they expected from students.

Even with the principal's leadership and the commitment of a dozen or so teachers, staff development at Winema failed to produce a schoolwide vision of pedagogy and learning. Coalition supporters at the school were unable to persuade many of their peers to change their thinking and practices. In fact, the high profile occupied by Coalition advocates had some negative effects on the school's professional cohesiveness. Because Coalition advocates had access to professional travel opportunities and a higher professional status in the eyes of the principal, they were resented by some colleagues. This division tended to weaken the school's professional community. In retrospect, this problem might have been avoided if staff development had been inclusive, sustained and focused on the issue of clarifying the school's primary intellectual goals for teaching and learning.

Standard Setting

High standards for student learning are central to successful school restructuring. Without clear, high standards to guide teachers' selection of content and goals for learning, the school is like a rudderless ship tossed aimlessly about in an educational sea. But what role do external agents play in helping schools develop a vision of high intellectual standards for curriculum and student achievement?

We found evidence of educators' standards being influenced by a number of external agents. Districts, states, professional organizations, and independent reform initiatives all contributed to the standard setting process. Teachers reported being influenced by books and

reports from professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and by independent developers, such as the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Accelerated Schools Project. Some states and districts mandated curriculum or achievement standards for public schools. Whether mandated or voluntary, we found that an array of external agents had stimulated professional dialogue to help schools define and implement standards for increasing the intellectual quality of student performance. Such dialogue usually resulted in reflection about goals and practices that strengthened professional community.

States employed a range of standard setting strategies. Several relied on more traditional competency and achievement tests which in many cases provoked questions about their intellectual value. Other states initiated new forms of assessment and curriculum frameworks that more clearly reflected efforts to raise the intellectual quality of student performance. More traditional forms of standard setting came from state testing programs such as the New York's Regents Competency Test (RCT), the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), and the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). Standards that showed more attention to demands for enhanced intellectual quality were included in the now defunct California Learning Assessment System (CLAS), the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), and the Vermont Assessment Program.

Since state-sponsored assessment aimed at higher intellectual quality were relatively new, they had yet to produce broad impact on instruction or on student achievement. While California, Vermont, and Kentucky each experienced political and/or technical problems with

their assessment efforts, these states did succeed in stimulating discussion at the school level of the importance of high standards as the basis for reform.

Although only recently implemented (beginning in 1993), the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) had the potential to elevate the intellectual quality of instruction because its framework and assessment techniques called for students to use complex academic knowledge and skills. For example, at the high school level students were assessed through three strategies: problem solving using state-developed paper-and-pencil tests, portfolios in mathematics and writing, and state administered "performance events" that emphasized applying knowledge and solving real-world problems in group settings. These tasks call for more demanding intellectual performances by students than conventional competency and achievement testing.

Independent developers such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Accelerated Schools Project, and the New Standards Project also helped schools to emphasize and clarify intellectual standards for student work. Sometimes these independent developers had positive effects on the quality of instruction, depending on conditions such as those described in the previous section. An example of standard setting by a professional organization was NCTM's standards for mathematics which influenced a number of SRS schools. For example, at Careen Elementary, described in Chapter 3, serious discussion of NCTM standards elevated mathematics teachers' knowledge of their field.

Adopting standards issued by professional organizations and independent developers was, of course, voluntary. Not surprisingly, those schools that made the best use of such standards were already inclined to see the need for them and to incorporate them into a larger

schoolwide framework. In general, these schools had created a culture in which staff were encouraged to search for help and draw upon ideas and insights from external resources. Standard setting by external agents helped to refine school visions already in place.

Deregulation

Deregulation by states and districts is a structural tool that can give schools a substantial degree of autonomy to purse innovation. As discussed in Chapters 7 and 10, we saw that autonomy sometimes promoted professional community by engendering a sense of local investment and ownership. The right to engage in participatory decision making characterized by shared power relations can enhance a school's ability to focus on intellectual quality and professional community. Here, we discuss in greater detail how different forms of deregulation helped schools address the two features central to successful restructuring. In some cases, new schools were founded with the district granting them a significant degree of independence from district regulations. In others, schools obtained a state charter to gain nearly complete deregulation from both state and district. In still other districts, schools struggled with their administrations to gain freedom to depart from conventional practice.

District Demonstration Schools

Two districts authorized special demonstration schools to advance restructuring. The immediate purpose in each case was to test and refine innovations in teaching, learning, and school organization. In the long run, administrators in the two districts hoped to establish models that could be implemented district wide. To create a demonstration school, a district assembled a core staff and then gave them general directions, resources, and permission to engage in practices not authorized at other schools. In effect, such schools were born

deregulated, but they were also closely monitored by the district's central office. Deregulation by the district to foster inventiveness and experimentation was constrained by pressure for the school to demonstrate success.

Selway Middle. Selway was created to demonstrate how to teach children to become inquirers. The superintendent, convinced that schools of the future had to look and act much different from those typical of the district, argued that students should not be locked into textbook learning. Instead, they should learn to use the kind of technology that retrieved, organized, and linked information world-wide. The superintendent persuaded several central office staff, the teachers' union, a group of business executives from the electronics industry, a number of influential parents, and community leaders to design a school around inquiry-based learning and technology. Several local foundations and businesses provided financial support and contributed state-of-the-art instructional technology. Students had frequent and easy access to computers, and each teacher had a personal computer with services such as E-mail and access to the Internet. The school's existence depended upon financial and technical support from these sources beyond the district.

As an urban school of choice, Selway served 280 students with about forty percent from minority groups. The district obtained waivers from the state to free the school from state requirements in curriculum and staff certification. The school minimized the role of the traditional principal. Instead, a group of four "lead teachers" had substantial decision making authority to manage the school in accordance with its mission. "Lead" teachers were hired on an eleven month basis to facilitate and reward their leadership responsibilities. A major

responsibility was to provide direction to the "general" staff in matters of curriculum and instruction.

The core vision of the school was to teach students how to inquire. Staff frequently referred to this vision with the claim that "students should learn how to learn." The vision emerged from the planning group who encouraged the teaching staff to consider new conceptions of how and where children learn. Featuring a highly flexible curriculum with minimal use of traditional textbooks, the school was sometimes described students as well as staff as a "textbook-free school."

A number of those who helped to found the school believed that learning should take place not only in the school building, but also in "real" places where adults worked and lived. The curriculum emphasized problems and topics that encouraged students to learn through the rich set of resources in the community. For example, the school was located near major art and science museums which students visited regularly to do research; they used the large city library (there was no school library); and they had internships with professionals in such fields as law, medicine, and aeronautics to extend learning in ways schools usually do not consider necessary or feasible. Selway students constructed knowledge by using a wide variety of resources and technology, all of which were expected to increase students' engagement in authentic learning.

However, two major problems developed at Selway and these eventually led to its demise as a demonstration school for the district. The first difficulty arose over a central feature of restructuring--differentiated staffing. The four lead teachers had substantial authority and responsibility for the success of the school, including directing the work of

general staff. But in exercising their authority, the lead teachers failed to build a strong professional community among general staff, and between general staff and themselves. Disagreements over who should make decisions eventually led to open, bitter conflict. On several occasions, the lead teachers also ignored the wishes of parents who expected to have a genuine role in decision making, and this increased the level of conflict. Reports of stressful working conditions for teachers weakened the union's support for differentiated staffing.

Evaluating the effectiveness of the school posed the second problem. Given the lack of assessment devices sensitive to the special kinds of curriculum, instruction, and technology found at Selway, favorable outcomes for students were difficult to demonstrate. More serious, however, was the requirement imposed by the central office that, regardless of the kinds of assessment offered by the school, student achievement must also be measured by standardized tests. The district assumed that documenting the achievement outcomes of Selway's students with conventional measures was necessary to publicly demonstrate the benefits of such a school. When results on these tests showed relatively low performance, especially in mathematics, some parents (and the central office) expressed their concerns.

The media picked up the story about disappointing test scores and the school faced a serious public relations problem. When Selway's founding superintendent left the district, the central office weakened in its resolve to support the school. Without district support, the school could not sustain the thrust of its initial mission. In this case, deregulation, a vision of intellectual quality for student learning, and district and community resources all proved inadequate to create a successful demonstration. The school's vision of student achievement and standardized testing proved to be a mismatch, at least politically. The absence of a

strong professional community among the staff made the school more vulnerable, and eventually the district office abandoned this promising venture.

Careen Elementary. Another district-created school for demonstration and development was Careen, described in Chapter 3. Like Selway, it served as an "experiment" by the district to test innovative ideas and practices with the intent of diffusing them to other schools in the district. Unlike Selway, Careen proved much more successful.

Careen's origins lay in concerns by the business community and district leadership over the competence of public school graduates. In response, the school board and superintendent decided to develop a site to test what was described by some as a blend of "progressive" education and the application of academic skills and knowledge to "real world" problems and settings. The particular name given this conception of teaching and learning was Applied Learning.

Careen was a school of choice for both students and staff. A central office administrator recruited a group of teachers from the district who were selected because of their skills and previous success in teaching. These teachers indicated general agreement with the premises of Applied Learning, and they saw an opportunity to teach in a stimulating educational environment trying new practices on the cutting edge of their profession. To assist the school's development, a local foundation funded a program of staff training, including stipends for teachers to attend summer workshops and Saturday sessions during the school year.

The district authorized Careen to engage in site-based management, a departure from conventional practice. The school had use of central office resources to develop its plans, the

opportunity to recruit skilled and committed teachers from throughout the district, and a special publicity campaign to recruit students. The school was exempted from using district textbooks; and, because of plans to develop new forms of authentic assessment around portfolios and narratives, Careen did not have to use the district's report card. The central office also paved the way for the school to establish its own year-around calendar, a unique option in the district. Through all of these facets of deregulation, the district afforded Careen a level of support not available to any other school in the district.

Overall, Careen succeeded in creating intellectual focus around the theme of Applied Learning. Moreover, teachers had sufficient competence to implement the concept in ways that professionals and most parents judged successful. Sustained attention to Applied Learning had strong political support, because the key central office administrator supporting the school dedicated herself to making it work well, and she generated financial and human resources to this end.

Teachers enthusiastically supported Applied Learning, but they struggled to build a strong professional community, mainly because the school was new and teachers were all transplanted from other schools. Except for the on-going staff development program, no structures (such as common planning time) were designed to ensure frequent face-to-face interaction among staff that could serve to strengthen shared norms and expectations. Careen provided an example of a deregulated school that succeeded in creating a focus on intellectual quality without a foundation of strong professional community. In this situation, the staff's prior commitment to Applied Learning provided the important element of cohesiveness to promote successful restructuring.

Deregulation As District Policy

Cibola High, described in Chapter 5, grew from a grass-roots movement headed by local educators whose concern for intellectual quality guided the school from the beginning. This concern was sustained in part because of the strong staff recruited by the principal, the presence of support networks such as the Coalition on which the school drew, and the intellectual and political leadership of its principal all helped to sustain the school's mission. In addition, however, Cibola had the significant benefits of membership in a special category of "alternative schools" established by the district to free them from bureaucratic rules and constraints.

The origins of this special status date back to 1984 when district administrators saw the need to grant autonomy to selected secondary schools that were small, innovative, and promising models of reform. As an alternative school, the district and the union allowed it to bypass seniority rules in recruiting teachers. Staff testified that without the freedom to select teachers who were both skilled and convinced of the school's intellectual purpose, Cibola could not have developed as it did.

The autonomy gained from alternative school status gave Cibola time and permission to develop its own educational vision. Autonomy allowed Cibola to define its own curriculum. It chose not to offer physical education and music; students obtained experiences in these areas through extra-curricular activities. Teachers taught interdisciplinary courses even though they lacked certification in all disciplines covered by the course. Portfolios and exhibitions became the central strategy for assessing the competence of students. Moreover, to establish accountability the school invited external reviewers to participate in the

assessment of graduating students; the intent was to insure that students were competent, especially that they were qualified for college entrance. As a school of choice, it attracted many students that fit the staff's interest in intellectual development and authentic pedagogy.

An important factor contributing to Cibola's success was the financial support it secured; extra start-up money came from the district. But this initial district funding proved to be only a small portion of what the school subsequently raised from a variety of foundations and private contributors. Grant money came largely without strings attached, and this gave the school important flexibility to develop its program. Staff at Cibola helped to establish a local consortium of schools engaged in similar reform efforts, and the consortium served as a conduit for raising grant money to support these schools. The funding from external agents provided Cibola with additional staff and release time to develop new curricula and assessment materials. Innovations in these areas gained the school national visibility as a development site for successful school reform.

Wresting Autonomy from the District

Eldorado Elementary served 350 students (63 percent Hispanic, 22 percent African American, 15 percent white), about seventy percent of whom qualified for free lunch. The school was first conceived when the district announced plans to close a traditional, poorly performing elementary school occupying the same building. Community members and parents responded to the threatened loss of their neighborhood school by banding together with a small group of teachers to plan a new school. This coalition led to the founding of a school with a unique vision designed to serve the multi-cultural population of a particular neighborhood. The school featured a two-way bilingual immersion program. On alternate

days, English and Spanish are used as the language of instruction for all students, whether dominant in English or Spanish. The intellectual focus of the school is on multi-cultural issues intended to promote racial and social class tolerance.

The district and the school had an uneasy relationship from the beginning, and Eldorado's story illustrates some of some of the barriers that an external agent such as the district can put in the path of reform. One of the school's founders described negotiations with district office staff as punctuated with a lot of "yes, but. . ." language. The district's administration concurred that proposals for Eldorado were interesting, even creative, but they were impractical, or cost too much, or violated some rule. Eventually, after prolonged negotiations the school district authorized and supported a national search for a bilingual principal. The district office recommended a person who spoke German, but both the staff and the Hispanic community refused to accept the recommendation. Parents from the school community organized and picketed the district office; they attended a school board meeting where they succeeded in persuading the newly hired superintendent to direct his office to find a Spanish speaking principal. Eventually a Spanish speaking principal was appointed.

Parents continued to lobby school board members and the superintendent to promote the legitimacy of Eldorado's bilingual and multi-cultural vision. Parents' advocacy helped the school to obtain a fair share of the district's resources. Teachers built strong relations with parents, and the leverage created by parent activism played an important role in wresting greater autonomy from district regulation.

Staff believed that they were ahead of the district on school restructuring issues, and part of their task was to push the district to allow further innovations. At times, staff had to

find ways to work around bureaucratic problems. For example, the school wanted parents to have a majority on the governing council, but union rules stipulated that in site-base managed schools teachers must be the voting majority. While Eldorado observed the letter of the law, staff appointed a set of alternate parent representatives to increase the number participating in discussions, if not actually voting. Further, staff permitted parents to constitute a majority on the committees appointed by the council.

Another bureaucratic struggle developed when the school wanted to establish a new schedule that allowed for dismissal of children at noon one Friday a month to provide staff with additional planning and meeting time. The proposal sat in the district office and with the union for months. Apparently neither wanted to act on the request. The school began its lobbying, and at the next round of contract negotiations, an "Eldorado clause" was included in the contract to permit special scheduling arrangements.

As a site-base managed school, Eldorado took advantage of the district's offer of waivers. For example, the school developed its own report card, and it secured an exemption from district curriculum guidelines. Because site-based management allowed for control of its budget, the school used funds to hire a parent participation coordinator and para-professionals to help English dominant students better learn Spanish. As a magnet school, Eldorado received some of the federal money given to districts with magnet programs, but otherwise the district did not provide additional funding to promote Eldorado's restructuring.

Eldorado's staff and parents joined hands in a long struggle for the legitimacy of their unique academic vision: two bi-lingual instruction grounded in a multi-cultural curriculum. In spite of initial district and union resistance, the hard-won fight for a degree of district

deregulation helped to create a strong professional community. Because of the school's strong support in the community, accommodation by the district became politically necessary. The Eldorado experience shows the potential for parents and staff to overcome initial resistance by a district.

State Charters

At the time of our study, charters were a relatively new form of deregulation. While our study included schools from sixteen states, only one granted charters. We studied two charter schools in that state, Okanagon and Lamar. In this section we explain how charters helped to strengthen the intellectual quality of student achievement and professional community in these schools.

To obtain a charter, the state required a school to write a proposal that described school governance procedures, instructional practices, and student outcomes. Each school's application built upon a vision that was already largely implemented, but the need to describe and justify it in a logical and elaborated framework helped to further clarify the path of development.

Charter status legally deregulated the schools, exempting them from most state and district rules. The main benefit from the schools' perspective was protection from interference by the district. It also served as a guarantee to educators that the investment in reform would become less vulnerable to sudden changes in local political leadership and policy.

Okanagon Middle. Okanagon served 1,350 mostly poor and minority students: 34 percent African American, 17 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Anglo, and 41 percent Asian.

Fifty-four percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Described in Chapter 4, the school was re-created when the district gave a principal the authority to select a core group of teachers and plan a new neighborhood school. They secured grants from the state and from foundations to support planning and implementation. With these funds, the staff purchased books on school reform, held retreats, discussed ideas about the kind of school that would best serve the poor and minority children from the school's neighborhood, and visited other restructuring schools. External support made possible a rich dialogue that eventually forged consensus around the intellectual goals and practices of their school.

From the outset, the district had granted the staff considerable authority to invent a new school. Still, staff found that some district regulations impeded their work. Consequently, when the new state law offered the possibility of increased autonomy through charter status, Okanagon staff voted to pursue it.

The charter application process required Okanagon's staff to clarify the school's intellectual goals. Staff developed formal written academic standards to guide students' and teachers' work. They also created a set of campus and classroom behavior standards for students. These two sets of explicit standards subsequently shaped the day-to-day language and expectations of students, parents, and staff who saw the standards as important guides to teaching, learning, and personal behavior.

With the granting of the state charter, Okanagon was assured the authority to make decisions in several areas crucial to carrying out its vision. Most important from the school's point of view was the freedom to select new staff who embraced the school's vision without being restricted by seniority rights stipulated in the district-union negotiated agreement. The

school used its authority to eliminate counselors from the staff, because the school's vision called for teachers to undertake an extended role that included counseling.

Okanagon is an example of a school that was poised to use deregulation to act more consistently on its self-defined mission. The charter helped to further build and consolidate a staff that had already developed a strong professional community, and the charter helped staff to clarify and strengthen the intellectual quality of teaching and learning.

Lamar Elementary. Lamar Elementary, also a charter school, was described in Chapter 3 as a school initially founded to maintain progressive educational ideals and practices of the 1960s amid the "back to basics" movement that followed. Child-centered instruction focused on students' cognitive development through inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, thematic units. As an alternative school of choice, it initially had an important degree of independence from the district, but it still experienced cumbersome, bothersome constraints. When the possibility of obtaining a state charter appeared, the staff and parents of Lamar jumped at the chance. Like Okanagon, Lamar's charter proposal required elaborating in writing the conception of teaching, learning, and school governance they had practiced for a number of years. Obtaining a charter guaranteed that the vision and its practices could continue despite likely changes in district politics.

Parents and staff said that before the charter the relationship between Lamar and the district had been a constant tension-filled struggle. Having obtained a state charter, the school had the right to develop its own assessments of student achievement in order to demonstrate effectiveness as required by the charter. As with Okanagon, Lamar was able to hire staff outside the negotiated agreement between the union and district. Any certified teacher could

be hired, and in special areas such as music, art, and coaching, a teacher need not be state certified. Such autonomy gave the school much greater flexibility in staffing non-traditional classes. Lamar was also exempted from district and state regulations governing curriculum content. While defining their own curriculum had long been a trademark of Lamar, this now became officially accepted practice. The charter eliminated time-consuming paper work formerly demanded by the district's central office. For example, it freed the school from having to seek specific waivers from the district for each deviation in the way it used in-service days or evaluated staff.

Charter status and parental involvement intersected to produce positive results for Lamar; deregulation freed the school to spend private funds raised by parents. Since its beginning, Friends of Lamar, a non-profit organization run by parents and community supporters, raised money from private contributions to supplement instructional programs--approximately eighty-five thousand dollars annually to support special enrichment programs in the arts, music, and horticulture. The money paid for supplies and field trips, and to hire a full-time aides for teachers, but paying for personnel was controversial. District officials interpreted regulations to permit the use of private contributions for materials, equipment, and field trips, but not to hire supplementary teaching staff. With charter status, Lamar's principal believed this restriction had been eliminated.

For Lamar, charter status was the icing on the cake. It helped the staff to achieve a tighter focus on academic purpose, built a stronger professional community, and reaffirmed the essential link between parents and the school.

Parent Involvement

Parents, though not formally organized as an "agency," are potentially an important source of external influence at any school. We have already documented their crucial roles at Lamar and Eldorado. Lamar offered the premier example of parents participating in significant ways in all phases of the school--from involvement in hiring staff to raising money and influencing the content of curriculum. At Eldorado parents helped to found and govern the school, but possibly more important was their role as lobbyists with the school board and superintendent to protect the school's mission and to increase its autonomy. In fact, each of the twenty-four schools included numerous examples of parent participation, if not always as significant as at Lamar and Eldorado. In other schools, parents helped to build a new playground, conducted student registration for courses, taught other adults, raised scholarship money, and helped to make policy governing the school.

Fourteen of the twenty four schools had some form of shared decision making council that included parent membership. But, as shown in Chapter 10, in only six of the fourteen did actual shared power relations provide parents with the opportunity to influence decisions. In the other eight schools, participation remained largely symbolic; informal arrangements maintained hegemony by professionals on important decisions.[3]

Seven of the twenty-four schools stood apart as <u>high parent involvement</u> schools. "High involvement" means that, compared to other schools in the SRS study, parents participated with greater frequency in one or more of three areas: decision making through school governance; developing curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment; and providing technical support for the school (such as fund raising or helping teachers in the classroom). The seven

high involvement schools included four elementary schools -- Falls River, Careen, Eldorado, Lamar -- and three middle schools -- Morris, Selway, and Red Lake.

Three of the seven high involvement schools also demonstrated a high degree of consensus -- Lamar Elementary, Eldorado Elementary, Red Lake Middle. In these schools, parents and educators held common beliefs and shared expectations about schooling. High consensus helped these schools to maintain a clear vision for intellectual quality and to strengthen professional community. Lamar and Eldorado were examples of both high involvement and high consensus. They demonstrated significant parent involvement in areas such as governance and fund-raising, stimulated largely by a strong commitment to a shared school vision.[4]

Most schools experienced some mixture of consensus and conflict, but consensus generally prevailed. For example, Careen Elementary (Chapter 3), sometimes faced an element of conflict when parents raised doubts about the purpose and value of certain school practices such as assessment by portfolios and teacher narratives evaluating student skills and achievement. However, in contrast to those schools characterized by consensus, a few experienced significant conflict between parents and staff over school practices. In some cases, high parent involvement consisted of parents trying to change policies or practices with which they disagreed. For example, Morris Middle, an urban school created to address the needs of poor minority children, felt pressure from middleclass parents who wanted the school to make greater effort at preparing their children for tests that would get them into the city's "good" high schools.

Two schools had both high involvement and high conflict -- Selway Middle and Falls River Elementary -- because parents and staff disagreed strongly about specific practices. Selway Middle, described earlier in this chapter, began as a new school devoted to testing a number of innovations including a role for parents in shaping curriculum and governing the school. Initially parents supported the school with strong involvement, but the school soon encountered a number of divisive issues that disenchanted some parents. For example, some parents believed that student discipline was too lax; others wanted their children to spend more time learning through direct experiences in the community. When staff appeared to resist parental suggestions, several dissatisfied parents pulled their children from the school.

Falls River Elementary also faced strong parental dissatisfaction because of children's low reading scores. Parents organized to protest against the school's program of whole-language instruction which they believed to be responsible for low reading performance. Some parents advocated a return to phonics instruction. When the principal resisted, parents organized and drove her from the school. In the short run, this conflict destroyed community support for the school. In the long run, such conflict could conceivably, under certain conditions, strengthen the school. But as the Falls River case suggests, if conflict is to be productive, a fair and respectful process of dialogue between parents and educators must occur. If parents are to have a meaningful right to influence school decisions, the staff must remain open to rethinking their professional views and responsibilities.

Like other external agents, parents had the potential to influence a school to pay attention to the intellectual quality of student learning. Where consensus existed between parents and teachers over the purpose of schooling, powerful alliances emerged. Lamar stood

out as the clearest example of parents reenforcing a vision of schooling with intellectual quality at its center. At Falls River and Selway, on the other hand, parents challenged educators' professional views. The resulting conflict destroyed order, harmony, and purpose in these schools. We saw no examples where serious conflict was managed in ways to eventually enhance intellectual quality and professional community for a school.

Conclusion

The study did not discover an example of a school once characterized by fragmentation, disorder, and confusion about its educational vision and practices that was subsequently transformed by the work of external agencies. External agents may not be powerful or skillful enough to accomplish such transformation. However, independent developers, districts, states, and parents provided important technical assistance, funding, and political support. In fact, the twenty-four restructuring schools each experienced some positive influence from external agents. Those schools whose culture already predisposed them to address issues of intellectual quality and professional community found productive ways to use the resources and opportunities offered by external agents. But external agents alone did not guarantee that schools productively focused on intellectual quality and professional community.

External agents may offer new resources or performance standards or pressure schools for accountability, but unless schools have the cultural capacity to strengthen intellectual quality and professional community, additional resources or new standards can easily fail to generate successful restructuring. Pressure for strong external accountability was unrelated to organizational capacity in the SRS schools (Newmann, King & Rigdon, 1996).

The most successful schools in the study had basic cultural features that combined with structural autonomy to allow them to flourish on the margins of their educational systems. The special character of these schools enabled them to productively mobilize human and material resources and structural innovations. If external agencies and their policies can find ways to assist all schools in the task of addressing intellectual quality and professional community, then successful restructuring is more likely to move from the margins of education toward becoming the heart of the American educational system.

Notes to Chapter 11

1. Appendix A describes the method of data analysis used in this chapter.
2. This conclusion is consistent with a large body of research on site-based management (Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995).
3. For more detailed analysis of parent participation, see Wehlage & Osthoff (1996).
4. Not all schools that focused on intellectual quality and professional community had high parent involvement. For example, Cibola had only modest levels of parent participation. Shared power relations in the school did not extend to the parents. Reinforcing the school's messages at home was the main role for parents. This was probably acceptable to most parents because they appeared to trust the school to do what was best for their children.

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